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ABSTRACT

Findings of a study that examined change in four elementary schools (members of large urban public school systems located in the south and southwest sections of the United States) from a conventional to a participatory model of school organization are presented in this paper. To compare teacher roles before and after implementation of the Accelerated Schools model, data were obtained from document analysis and interviews with teachers, principals, assistant principals, social workers, and parents. Findings indicate that before adoption of the model, teachers in each of the schools acted as "instruments of policy," who lacked team effort and idea-sharing. All teachers in three schools agreed that the model had led to enhanced empowerment and increased involvement in the decision-making process. Teacher roles remained the same in one school. In two schools, the increased responsibility and understanding of empowerment contributed to teacher dissatisfaction. Four tables are included. (Contains 24 references.) (LMI)

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Transforming Schools:
Foundations for School Restructuring
Focusing on the Role of the Teacher
in Four Elementary Schools

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Abstract

This paper examines the change process that occurred in four elementary schools that moved from a conventional mode of school organization to a participatory mode of school organization by implementing the Accelerated Schools model. The extent of change in the school organization was analyzed by focusing on the role of the teacher.

Purpose of Paper

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the findings of an investigation of four elementary schools that made the transition from a traditional, top-down style of school organization to a participatory, bottom-up approach to school organization by implementing the Accelerated Schools Project. Efforts were made in the study to understand the change process a school must undertake to embrace the Accelerated Schools Project. In order to assess the change process the following research questions were asked:

1. What was the status quo at each school, focusing on the role of the teacher, before the initiation of the Accelerated Schools Process?

2. What was the status quo at each school, again focusing on the role of the teacher, at the time of the interviews?

3. Were there changes in the status quo between the two observations points?

4. What factors facilitated or inhibited change toward acceleration focusing on the role of the teacher?

Impact of School Reform

The surge of the school reform movements of the 1980s emphasized excellent schools for the majority and concentrated on improving the conventional approach to schooling (Boyd, 1989; Nathan, 1986). The benefits of these reform movements have bypassed the children of urban poverty (St. John, Miron, & Meza, 1991; Maeroff, 1989) and have excluded teachers from the decision making process (Pink, 1988; Duttweiler, 1988; Cuban, 1984).

Students in the inner-city schools were not benefitting from the conventional approach to education. More and more educationally at-risk students are dropping out and those that do graduate do not possess the skills to be productive in the work force (Comer, 1988a, b; Maeroff, 1988, Goodlad & Oakes, 1988). Thus reforms to improve the conventional approach "...may well have widened the gap between the haves and the have nots" (St. John et al, 1991).

The majority of students that meet the educationally at-risk criteria are concentrated among racial and ethnic minority groups and economically disadvantaged populations. The very population that is expected to rise rapidly because of high birth rates and tremendous immigration from the Third World (Levin, 1988a; Boyd, 1989).

Research in the 1980s tended to underline the importance of top-down components in initiating change (Cuban, 1988; Boyd, 1989). As a result, state legislatures have passed laws to standardize and "teacher-proof" the curriculum (Darling-Hammond, 1988). Local districts joined the legislative endeavors by pacing instruction, determining grading methods, and establishing promotional standards (Darling-Hammond, 1988). Current reforms stress raising the standards of education but do not provide the additional resources or new strategies to help the students meet these standards (Levin, 1987a; Boyd, 1989).

Part of the difficulty in creating lasting change in schools can be attributed to top-down approaches that initiate change from

above. Many decisions about the curriculum, its scope and sequence, and the ways it is to be implemented are decided by those outside the classroom (Common, 1983; Darling-Hammond, 1988). Sergiovanni (1992) notes that, "The more professionalism is emphasized, the less leadership is needed. The more leadership is emphasized, the less likely it is that professionalism will develop" (p. 42). Apple (1983) maintaines that instead of professionalizing teaching, these top-down prescriptions brought about the "proletarianization" of teaching and, as a result, teachers became "deskilled" in the process.

In his recent keynote address at the National Association of Elementary School Principals, Lamar Alexander, United States Secretary of Education, concurred by stating that, "If the nation's schools are going to change, they're going to change from the bottom-up--not the top down....And we know the change won't happen unless it's led by the people in the classroom." (Adams, 1992).

Recent research indicates that teachers are willing to put forth great effort and to implement sweeping changes (a) if the change is clearly understood and developed collaboratively (Fullan, 1985); and (b) if the change addressed a certain need, showed quality and practicality, and was ambitious and complex (Clark, Lotto, & Astuto, 1984). Eisenhart, Cuthbert, Shrum, and Harding (1988) note that the absence of teacher input in decisions that shape teaching practice often caused the innovations to fail to achieve the results that were intended. Teacher influence in decisions affecting the teaching-learning process has "...been

cited by teachers as a dimension of their professional environment in which they desire the greatest participation and yet experience the greatest deprivation" (Erlandson & Bifano, 1987, p. 32).

Teachers are in the classrooms dealing with the needs of the students on a daily basis. This "hands on" knowledge has not been utilized by most school sites as teachers have traditionally been excluded from decision making processes.

The trend today indicates that schools are not serving the nation's increasingly diverse population (Levin, 1987; Boyd, 1989). The top-down, traditional approach has not been successful in overcoming the educational problems that are particularly severe in heavily minority concentrated poverty neighborhoods in the inner-core sections of large cities.

If schools are to serve better the growing educationally at-risk student population, what is needed is a new approach to school reform. This approach must involve more than moving back to the basics. The fundamental assumptions upon which schools for the at-risk population are based must change.

The Accelerated Schools Process

Recently, policy makers and analysts have begun to champion a new solution for revitalizing the schools. This solution utilized a shift from the concepts of hierarchical arrangements and fixed division of labor to the theory of school-based, participatory management and school-site empowerment. The Accelerated Schools model is a process through which individual school staffs build a unity of purpose, undertake responsibility for decision-making and

the consequences of those decisions, and build curriculum and instructional experiences on their own strengths and the strengths of the students, parents, and community (Levin, 1987).

Accelerated Schools emphasize speeding up, rather than slowing down, the progress of educationally at-risk students. The goal of the schools is to close the achievement gap by the end of elementary school experience, which according to the literature on Accelerated Schools, involves a fundamental change, or transformation, in the organization of the school.

The Accelerated Schools Project implements strategies which systematically eradicate traditional "remediation" techniques through the creation of cooperative learning activities which manifest high expectations and equally high status for every student in participating schools. An accelerated curriculum should be capable of motivating and sustaining the interest of all students, regardless of previous achievement levels. It includes concepts, analysis, problem-solving, critical inquiry, and interest application activities which extend across the demarcation lines of subject areas; and it facilities a student-paced progression.

The transformation of a conventional school into an Accelerated School involves its restructuring around the three guiding principles of the model--unity of purpose, empowerment, and building on strengths (Levin, 1987). Through these principles, a pedagogy evolves which considers the total learning environment.

Unity of purpose involves the development of a clear vision of the organizational and instructional framework required to bring

students into the mainstream of education. The school's vision embodies the unified efforts of parents, teachers, and students around the realization of their common goals and endeavors.

Empowerment coupled with responsibility refers to an acknowledgment of parents', teachers', and students capacity and willingness to take responsibility for the educational process. This involves identifying needs, making decisions about how to address them, and accepting ownership of outcomes. One of the building blocks of the Accelerated Schools model is the expanded role of all groups to participate in and take responsibility for the educational process and educational results. In Accelerated Schools, administrative roles are redefined to include input from parents, teachers, and students.

Building on strengths is a continual process of identifying and utilizing all available human resources within the school and its community. In this process the opportunities for maximal parent, student, teacher, and administrator demonstration of individual talents is crucial.

Description and Analysis of the Change Process

Methodology

The case study research method was used in the study to collect the data. Case study research involves an assortment of research methodologies, including interviews, direct observations, document reviews, archival records, participant-observation, and surveys (Baldridge, 1971; St. John, 1981; Yin, 1984).

Documents such as test scores, attendance records, parental involvement and attendance at meetings, memorandums, administrative documents, grant applications, vision statements, surveys, and brainstorming papers were the hard data utilized in explaining the change process. Open-ended interview questions allowed the researcher to learn about the participants perceptions, experiences, and observations before and after the implementation of the Accelerated Schools concepts.

Interviews were conducted at the school site with teachers, principals, assistant principals, social workers, and parents. The principal of each of the schools was consulted to determine the parents and teachers to be interviewed. An attempt was made to talk to people who both supported and resisted the change process. An interview guide was employed in the study and asked questions about: (a) The status of the role of the teacher at each school before the implementation of the Accelerated Schools concept or change process; (b) the status of the role of the teacher at each school at the time of the interviews; (c) the changes, if any, between the two observation points; and (d) the factors that facilitated or inhibited change in the schools.

Notes were taken during the interviews and most of the interviews were taped. After each interview, a written record was made of each session. These records contained (a) summaries and notes of what was said, (b) recorded transcription of important responses, (c) notes on methodology, and (d) personal emotional experiences (Lofland & Lofland, 1984). Each taped interview was

typed verbatim and the transcript was sent to the interviewee for review and verification of facts. In the case of the few interviews that were not taped, the transcript was typed and sent to each interviewee for review and verification of facts.

A continuum was developed to record the results of the three investigations. To assess change in the role of the teacher, each continuum was divided into two dimensions. One side of the continuum (the left) represented the characteristics of the traditional mode of school organization, while the other side of the continuum (the right) represented the extreme characteristics of the Accelerated Schools model.

Each of the ends were further divided into "extreme" and "moderate," indicating degree of the characteristics on either end of the continuum. The middle quatrain of each continuum was considered neutral. For example, the extreme quatrains would assume virtually <u>all</u> related were of the top-down mode, in the case of the left dimension; or the participatory mode, in the case of the right dimension. The neutral category assumes a combination of relations. The distinction between the five quatrains assumes predominance of one form of relations or the other. Table 1 illustrated the continuum.

Table 1

Extreme	Moderate	Neutral	Moderate	Extreme

The criteria used to assess the place a school fell on each continuum was the same in all cases. The responses obtained in the interviews and the direct and participant observations were used to make judgements about placement. In order to assess the organizational structure of each school before the implementation of the Accelerated Schools proces, judgements were made based on the responses of teachers that had been members of the faculty prior to the adoption of the process.

The Initial State of the Schools

Each of the schools are members of large urban public school systems located in the south and southwest section of the United States. The research was based on numerous on-site visits that were made to each of the three schools to obtain documents; to make observations; and to interview the teachers, the principals, the assistant principals, social workers, and parents in order to gain the evidence needed to make judgements about the change process.

The analysis of school change focused on change in the deep structure and embedded patterns in the behavior of the school community. The analysis examined evidence regarding whether there was a transition from a tradition, top-down model of school

organization to a bottom-up, participatory model of school organization. Specifically, the analysis considered whether during the initial phase, Accelerated Schools made changes in role of teacher. This analysis examined a range of evidence, including the school's vision statement; teacher, parent, and principal interviews; cadre or task force meetings; and site observations.

In order to determine the organizational structure and the climate of the school interviews with teachers, principals, and parents were examined. Open-ended interview questions were used to allow the researcher to learn about the participants perceptions, experiences, and observations before the implementation of the Accelerated Schools concept.

Focusing on the role of the teacher, judgments were made to determine the characteristics of each quatrain on the continuum based on questions such as:

1. Did the teachers demonstrate a desire to accelerate their knowledge base or were they satisfied with the status quo?

2. Did the teachers exhibit a willingness to combine relevant curriculum with powerful and diverse instructional techniques in order to accelerated the progress of all students?

3. Were the teachers willing to examine and improve their repertoire of relevant skills in order to accelerate the process of all students?

4. Were the teachers willing to extend their involvement beyond the limits of their individual classroom?

5. Did the faculty members genuinely embrace the process or did they mask their real attitudes behind a posture of pseudo-participation?

6. Was there evidence of cooperation and of the sharing of talents, information, and expertise on the part of the teachers?

Table 2 portrays the role of the teacher in each of the four schools before the implementation of the Accelerated Schools process.

Table 2

School Organization Before Change Process

Role of Teacher

Instruments of school policy Curriculum and instructional methods follow mandates				Teacher empowerment Curriculum and instructional methods targeted on student needs
Extreme	Moderate	Neutral	Moderate	Extreme
Cedarcrest				
Griswald				
McBride				
Forest				

In the area of decision making and teacher empowerment, all four of the schools exhibited characteristics that justified placement in the extreme quatrain on the left side of the continuum. A member of the Cedarcrest faculty before the Accelerated Schools process explained that, "I felt like everything was pretty much, you know, there were pretty rigid guidelines and you were expected to follow those guidelines and not question those guidelines."

Ruth Oliver stated that after becoming Principal of McBride School, she encouraged the teachers to become involved in decision making. As she recalled, "But I was never successful at it because unless I told them when to do it, how to do it, when to turn it in,....Unless I answered all of those questions, they were in a flounder."

Suzanne Russell, a teacher at McBride School before the change process, summed up the opinions of the other teachers when she stated, "You know, [prior to the change] we were told what to do all the time. You come to work and your told exactly what to do. You don't have to worry about that."

The teachers that had been members of the Griswald faculty for a number of years stated that they operated in a system that required adhering to rather than developing policy. Maria Andrieu capsulized the utterances of the teachers when she stated, "...I have to get used to this word 'empowerment.' I never felt that I had any sort of power as a teacher. Because I've been more or less told what to do."

The traditional top-down mode of school operation that existed at Forest resulted in a "...lack of team effort." As one teacher noted, "...nobody really concerned themselves with the ones [the teachers] that were not so good....There wasn't that sharing and team effort and everybody taking full responsibility for the school. You know, for the total school not just their little segment whatever they were responsible for--their class, their children."

Assessment of Status of School at the Time of the Site Visit

The role of the teacher in each of the four schools at the time of the site visit is pictured in Table 3.

Table 3

School Organization at the Time of the Site Visit

	Role of Teacher	
Instruments of school policy		Teacher empowerment
Curriculum and instructional methods follow mandates		Curriculum and instructional methods targeted on student needs
Extreme	Moderate	Neutral	Moderate	Extreme
			McBride	
	Griswald			
		Forest		
				Cedarcrest

Each of the five teachers at McBride agreed that the Accelerated Schools process had empowered them to make decisions. The teacher who usually disagreed that the Accelerated Schools process had made a meaningful change in the school organization, admitted that, "Yes, we are asked about our opinions."

Suzanne Russell's statement captured the view of the teachers interviewed at McBride when she said, "...that's the way I feel sometime, like 'Oh, I can do that. Wow! I didn't know I could do that.'" This expression of empowerment by the interviewees is in

keeping with the attributes of the moderate quatrain on the right side of the continuum.

At the time of the interviews the faculty members at Cedarcrest were unable contain their enthusiasm and pride in the evolution that had occurred in the role of the teacher. As Sue Williams explained, "It's nice to be recognized as a professional and for the Principal [Allison Agnew] to know that you are a trained professional and you can do your job. And she allows us to do it."

Judy Jordan expressed the attitude of the entire school community when she said, "...we have come full circle from what it [the organization of the school] was when I got here six years ago. It is truly shared management." This expression of accomplishment and recognized professionalism corresponds with the qualities of the extreme quatrain on the right side of the continuum.

The role of the teacher at Dalton at the time of the site visit had begun to move from isolated and excluded to involved and empowered. The transformation that occurred at Forest exhibits characteristics that match the neutral quatrain on the continuum. All of the seven teachers were interviewed confirmed that they were now empowered to make decisions. The Principal also noted that the Accelerated Schools process had created more of a team effort among the teachers. As Rhonda Dwight explained, "...the biggest change to me has been in the faculty, the attitude of the faculty--the working together."

Five faculty members were interviewed at Griswald School and each interviewee stated that the role of the teacher had become demoralized rather than empowered. The consensus of the teachers was that there was, as Julie Laurent explained, "Not enough flexibility going on. And in order for this program to work, you have to have flexibility." Sharon Campbell expressed the opinions of the teachers and the reason for the lack of flexibility when she stated, "[What the teachers need is] more support from the administration [the Principal]--then I think things could be resolved and would change." The inability on the part of the Principal to share authority and responsibility matches the traits of the extreme quatrain on the left side of the continuum.

Assessing the Degree of Change

Table 4 pictures the role of the teacher that emerged as a result of the change process in each of the four schools.

Table 4

Assessing the Degree of Change

Role of Teacher

Instruments of school policy	Teacher empowerment
Curriculum and instructional	Curriculum and
methods follow mandates	instructional methods
	targeted on student needs

Extreme	Moderate	Neutral	Moderate	Extreme
Griswald →				
				McBride
		Forest ←		
				Cedarcrest

The Accelerated Schools process created a change in the role of the teacher in three of the schools--Forest, McBride, and Cedarcrest. In the fourth school, Griswald, the role of the teacher remained unchanged.

The teachers in three of the schools--Forest, McBride, and Cedarcrest--contended that the Accelerated Schools process had created a change in their role. The faculty members expressed satisfaction in the ability to make decisions concerning monetary, curriculum, and instructional matters. The teachers expressed a renewed sense of professionalism resulting from the opportunity to

express their opinions and to have those opinions respected and/or implemented.

For a second time, the Accelerated Schools process created a dramatic change at Cedarcrest School; this time within the context of the variable--role of the teacher. The change in the role of the teacher created a move from the extreme quatrain on the left to the extreme quatrain on the right side of the continuum.

At Cedarcrest, all of the teachers interviewed repeatedly stressed that, after the adoption of the Accelerated Schools Project, they "...were treated as professionals." As one teacher explained, "Teacher empowerment was like automatic. We weren't restricted."

The interviewees at McBride School also stated that the role of the teacher had changed due to the Accelerated Schools process. The teachers explained that they were "...getting more involved," made to feel "...like your able to lead," and "...made to feel more involved." Even the teacher that did not feel that the Accelerated Schools model had created a great deal of change in the school, concurred that a "limited" change had occurred in the area of decision making.

The change that occurred at Forest School in the role of the teacher was best stated by Rhonda Dwight when she declared, "...the biggest change to me has been in the faculty, the attitude of the faculty. The working together....we have had more input in our roles and policy making." The process of becoming involved in

making decisions about pedagogical matters matches the attributes of the neutral quatrain on the continuum.

The faculty members, without exception, interviewed at Griswald School expressed interest and enthusiasm in the fact that the Accelerated Schools model would allow teachers to become involved in decision making processes. After numerous decisions made by the faculty--independently and collectively--were rejected by the Principal, William Brewer, an attitude of distrust and dissatisfaction began to replace the earlier posture of enthusiasm and excitement. As a result, the role of the teacher became "deskilled" (Apple, 1983) rather than empowered. This change that occurred within the context of the role of teacher aligns with the characteristics exhibited in the extreme quatrain on the left side of the continuum.

Reasons for Change

The role of teacher changed, in varying degrees, in three of the four schools due to the implementation of the Accelerated Schools Process. At Forest, McBride, and Cedarcrest the change process had a positive effect. The role of the teacher did not change at Griswald.

The teachers that were interviewed at both Forest and McBride, noted that the change process had more of an effect in the area of role of teacher than any of the other areas. The interviewees at Forest stated that, due to the Accelerated Schools process, the school organization had changed more in the area of decision making on the part of the teachers than in any other area. Grade level

teachers were discussing possible ways of working together, thematic units were being explored, and there was "...a little movement toward hands on activities."

The McBride faculty members that were interviewed also noted that the change process had resulted in more decision making on the part of the teachers. Ruth Oliver described the attitude of the teachers when she stated, "...right now, it's a sharing kind of thing."

The autocratic leadership style of the Principal, Gail Benjamin, and the absence of decision making opportunities, demoralized the teachers at Cedarcrest to the point that the faculty turn over at an all time high. Through the Accelerated Schools process and under the leadership of Allison Agnew, "...teacher empowerment was like automatic." Each interviewee noted that "...being treated as professionals" had stimulated the faculty to assume leadership roles, to explore creative ways to improve the curriculum, and to utilized their talents to the fullest.

At Griswald the role of the teacher did not change as a result of the implementation of the Accelerated Schools process. While teachers were doing different things in the classroom, their role in the school did not change. The teachers entered the process optimistic about being involved in decision making processes. William Brewer's inability to build an element of trust and mutual respect turned the enthusiasm into apathy. As one teacher

explained, "And I don't think there's been that much teacher empowerment. Not what I expected out of the program."

Summary

The results of the study illustrates the current focus of the literature today--"Teachers become more committed and self-managing when schools become true communities, freeing principals from the burden of trying to control people (Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 41). The adoption of the Accelerated Schools process produced observable changes within the framework of the variable--role of teacher. Prior to the adoption of the model, the role of the teacher was the same in each of the four schools and could be characterized as "instruments of school policy." The teachers viewed the principal as the decision maker and themselves as robots programmed to follow directions. Each of the schools reported a lack of team effort on the part of the faculty. There was very little sharing of ideas.

Each of the teachers that were interviewed in three of the schools--Forest, McBride, and Cedarcrest--agreed that the Accelerated Schools model had empowered them to become involved in decision making processes and to take responsibility for those decisions. The role of the teacher at Griswald remained the same.

This understanding of empowerment coupled with responsibility renewed or ignited a spark in the teachers. They were no longer satisfied with the robot role. This enlightenment created dissatisfaction in the two schools--Forest and Griswald--where the principals restricted the teachers participation in the decision making processes. At Griswald, the dissatisfaction was replaced

with hostility and anger.

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